

ATLANTA-FULTON COUNTY EDUCATION COMMISSION

PROVISIONS FOR CREATING AN ATLANTA-FULTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The General Assembly of Georgia at the request of its representatives from Fulton and DeKalb counties created a Local Education Commission in 1964 and charged the Commission with responsibility:

To study the desirability and feasibility of combining the school systems of Fulton County and the City of Atlanta, including the portion thereof lying in DeKalb County; to provide that said Commission may draft a plan or plans for the combining of such school systems and submit same to members of the General Assembly from Fulton and DeKalb Counties.

The Commission was appointed and conducted the requested study, releasing its report in February, 1966. The report recommended the dissolution of the Atlanta and Fulton County School Districts and the creation of a new district in their stead. A plan for creating the proposed new district was included in the report which outlined the steps necessary for carrying out this recommendation.

The report of the Commission was accepted by the legislative delegation representing Fulton and DeKalb counties. After due deliberation of the recommendations, the legislative group secured approval for continuation of the Commission and requested it to carry out the steps which it had defined as being necessary for dissolving the present school districts and creating the proposed new district.

This memorandum outlines the tasks involved in creating the proposed new district and suggests how these steps may be executed. Five distinct but related tasks are essential in carrying out this latest charge to the Commission. They are:

1. Legal work which is necessary in order to dissolve the two present districts and to create the proposed new district.
2. Educational planning necessary to assure orderly and effective transition from the present two districts to the proposed single district.
3. Suggestion on the initial role of the new board of education.
4. A program for developing public understanding of the proposed new district and the reasons which support its creation.
5. Allocations of responsibility for getting done the necessary tasks.

Each of the five steps is outlined briefly in the following pages. The assumption is made that the plans for the proposed district and the characteristics of the district included in the 1966 report of the Commission are acceptable. They are, therefore, reported in this document where appropriate.

LEGAL WORK

Substantial legal tasks must be undertaken and completed in order to establish the proposed new school district. It is not possible to define with certainty all of these tasks at present because there is no existing overview of legislation and court decisions affecting the present Fulton County and Atlanta School Districts although major task areas can be defined. These follow:

1. Compile and analyze the legislation and court decisions which currently affect the Atlanta and Fulton County School Districts. Since this has never been done, there is no way of knowing at present the precise dimensions of this task.
2. Prepare the legislation which must be adopted in order to abolish the Atlanta and Fulton County School Districts. Until the necessary

research has been completed, there is no way of knowing just what this step involves. Whether a single piece of legislation general in nature will suffice or whether specific measures repealing separate laws relating to such subjects as taxation, bonding capacity, and so forth, are required remains to be seen.

3. Provide for meeting present and future unfulfilled legal and moral commitments of the Atlanta and Fulton County School Districts. Indebtedness, outstanding bonds, retirement provisions and tenure rights are examples of such commitments. Current welfare provisions for personnel may be continued or provisions can be made in new legislation to protect earned rights of present personnel through incorporation in any new welfare provisions which might be created for the school district. Establishing eligibility of the new school district for state funds is an illustration of another type of protection, as is assurance that current salary levels will not suffer in the transition.
4. Arrange for the transfer of properties of present school districts to the proposed new district.
5. Prepare a constitutional amendment for creating the new school district. This is an essential step under Georgia law. The amendment should be expressed in general terms insofar as feasible, leaving as many of the specific provisions concerning the district as possible to be taken care of outside the framework of constitutional mandates.

The amendment would necessarily specify the boundaries of the district, define its basic structure, and outline its powers. Such would be done within the limitations of other constitutional provisions affecting schools and school districts. For example, the

amendment would have to be consistent with the constitutional definition of the State's responsibility for public schools.

Legal provisions to be made either by constitutional amendment or statutory acts include creation of a board of education of seven members elected at large for terms of six years, one from each of seven subdivisions of the district of approximately the same number of persons. The amendment or enabling legislation should prescribe how the subdivisions are to be formed and how they are to be redivided as population changes dictate. Provisions should be made for the initial board to be elected as follows: three members to serve the full six-year term, two members to serve four-year terms, and two members to serve two-year terms. Thereafter, the board members would be elected as existing terms of members expire. Vacancies should be filled by appointment of the board until the next election at which time unexpired terms will be filled by the voters.

It will also be necessary to make provisions for a referendum to determine whether or not the amendment is to be approved (approval of voters of both districts is thought to be necessary).

Provisions should be made in the event the constitutional amendment is approved for the board members of the Atlanta and Fulton County Districts to serve as the board of education for the new district until the new board is elected and can take office. A schedule should be worked out, if needed, for shifting to the seven-man board elected as herein prescribed.

Board members should serve without compensation, receiving pay only for necessary expenses incurred in carrying out their duties as members of the Board of Education

The proposed new district should consist of the present Atlanta District, including the part which is in DeKalb County, and the present Fulton County District.

A fundamental task is providing for a sound fiscal base for the proposed school district. Establishing eligibility for State funds, establishing eligibility for Federal funds, and providing for sound local support are necessary considerations. The school board should be authorized to determine the property tax for supporting the school system, as the Atlanta School Board does at present. Furthermore, a uniform property assessment plan for the entire district should be adopted and homestead exemptions eliminated. Sources of local school support in addition to the property tax should be found.

6. If the proposed new school district is approved by the voters, a transition committee should be established immediately to work out the many plans and details essential to an orderly transition from two districts to one. The transition committee should include the two superintendents of schools, the chairman of each board of education, the fiscal officer of each school system, the assistant superintendent for instruction of each school system, and such other individuals as may seem appropriate. This committee should be responsible for the detailed transition plan to be approved by each board of education.
7. If the single school district is approved, the two present school systems should continue as at present for the balance of the school

year in which approval occurs and an additional full year in order to allow time for completion of needed transition plans.

8. The board of education for the new district should be elected as soon as possible after the approval of the constitutional amendment and should formally organize itself without delay and proceed at once with the selection of a superintendent. A superintendent should be employed and he should begin his work as far in advance of the creation of the new school district as is possible.
9. Execute any other legal assignments which are appropriate in the light of the analysis of pertinent legislation and court decisions and necessary provisions to assure creation of a school district conforming to recommendations of the Commission in its 1966 report.

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

An enormous volume of work must be completed before the proposed school district can go into operation. Many policies must be decided upon and much specific and detailed planning completed in order to assure the proper functioning of the new district. Major categories of policy development and needed provisions for operational guides under each are listed below. As is true of legal aspects described above, a precise definition of all of the steps necessary in this stage of planning is not possible presently and must await further exploration of current policies and practices of the two school systems.

Finance

1. Develop guides and procedures for making the annual school budget.
2. Develop plans and procedures for purchasing.

3. Develop plans for necessary and appropriate financial accounting.
4. Develop a budget for the new school district.

Personnel

1. Develop a system of personnel records for professional and other school personnel.
2. Develop salary schedules for professional and other personnel.
3. Develop a retirement system or systems.
4. Develop policies concerning employment practices for both professional and non-professional personnel.
5. Develop policies regarding tenure, sick leave, vacations, leaves of absence for professional growth, and others as needed.
6. Propose a method of combining the two central office staffs.

Pupils

1. Develop a system of records for pupil accounting.
2. Make recommendations concerning the visiting teacher program.

Administrative Structures and Regulations

1. Develop a plan for the internal organization and administration of the new school district including appropriate policies and definitions of responsibility.
2. Reach decisions on administrative and supervisory services to be provided.
3. Develop policies regarding the size of schools.
4. Develop general school regulations such as length of the school day, number of days in the school year, and designate holidays.

5. Develop a school calendar for the first year of the new system.
6. Recommend the future of the Metropolitan School Development Council.

Curriculum

1. Determine the curricula to be offered.
2. Develop plans for kindergartens in schools now in the Fulton County District.
3. Develop policies for selection and distribution of instructional materials.
4. Determine the special professional personnel to be provided such as librarians, school psychologists, counselors, and reading specialists.
5. Ascertain the curriculum adjustments which are necessary in the transition period and suggest how they are to be made.
6. Recommend policies regarding expansion of school programs with special reference to junior colleges, vocational and technical education, and adult education.
7. Make recommendations concerning teacher loads, including pupil-teacher ratios.

Services

1. Reach decisions on services to be provided by the school districts such as transportation, food, and health services and how they should be provided.
2. Determine the non-professional personnel to be provided such as

lunchroom workers, custodians, and secretaries.

3. Recommend plans for storing and handling textbooks and other instructional supplies.

Maintenance and Operation

1. Develop policies regarding kinds, numbers, types, and levels of competence needed by personnel in Maintenance and Operation.
2. Develop policies and procedures on the maintenance and operation programs.
3. Develop policies and procedures concerning work assignments and responsibilities of personnel.

Other

1. Make recommendations concerning organizations which should exist in the new school districts such as Parent-Teacher Associations, local teachers associations, and the various student organizations.

INITIAL ROLE OF THE PROPOSED NEW BOARD OF EDUCATION

Just how specific a blueprint for transition should be is to a considerable extent a matter of definition. At one extreme is a plan which provides only the basic legal provisions necessary for bringing the new district into being. At the other extreme is a plan which includes the multitude of basic policies, operational procedures and allocations of responsibility essential to the effective functioning of a school district.

The plan presented in this document embraces the first extreme and also the second to the extent that the Commission accepts responsibility for the essential educational planning which must precede the operational phase of a

new district. As already indicated, this planning consists largely of developing recommended policies and procedures consistent with the basic charter of the proposed new district as outlined above and decisions of the Commission with respect to the nature and quality of programs and services it thinks the new district should provide. However, only that which is mandated by law will be binding on the new Board of Education.

In a sense, the Commission is acting in these matters as an agent of a school district which is yet to be created and what it proposes in the realm of educational planning is for study and action by the new Board of Education unless areas are involved where decisions have been made already.

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROPOSED NEW DISTRICT

Since public schools are the business of the public, every opportunity should be seized upon to help the public keep as fully informed as possible on school problems, issues, needs, and the nature of good schools. A well informed public is essential to successful decision making on educational policies and plans.

Therefore, a major task in considering the proposed basic shift in the educational structure of Atlanta and Fulton County is developing and distributing among all citizens adequate information on the proposed change and the reasons which lead to the proposal. The report of the Commission with its treatment of both sides of the issue of a single school district should be made available to all citizens and its contents should be widely publicized. Therefore, if the proposed constitutional amendment is adopted and a referendum is held, the referendum should be preceded by a systematic and well organized public information program.

Mass media of communication should be employed to develop interest and public understanding. Newspaper coverage should be stressed. Both radio and television should be used extensively. The pros and cons of the proposed district reorganization plan should be presented through all three media. In addition, presentations to civic clubs, Parent-Teachers Associations, and other formal groups should be stimulated. Many informed citizens should be used in this program. Among such citizens should be leaders from all walks of life, especially school leaders, including Board of Education members. By the time the election is held, all citizens should be fully informed on the issues at stake. In no other way is it possible to reach an adequate decision on the school organization issue.

GETTING THE JOB DONE

It is the responsibility of the coordinator appointed by the Commission to prepare and submit to the Commission the transition plan as outlined above. An adequate plan requires bringing into play an array of specialized competence beyond the ken of any single individual; therefore, extensive use should be made of carefully selected consultants.

The legal work should be entrusted to Mr. Pete Latimer, Attorney for the Atlanta Board of Education, and Mr. James Groton, Attorney for the Fulton County Board of Education.

Dr. R. L. Johns, University of Florida, or some one of comparable stature in school finance, should be secured as a consultant on all planning involving finance, purchasing, and accounting.

Dr. Willard Elsbree, Emeritus Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, or some other authority in personnel, should be secured

as a consultant on policies and procedures concerning all categories of personnel. This assignment would include proposed salary schedules and welfare provisions.

Curriculum authorities should be consulted as needed.

A committee of leading citizens should be appointed and given responsibility for conducting an adequate public information program. The Commission should appoint this committee upon recommendation of personnel by the Atlanta and Fulton County school superintendents and approval by the two boards of education. Appropriate professional personnel should be available to the committee.

Appropriate personnel from the two school systems should be involved in the development of proposed policies and procedures, especially in information and evaluation roles.

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